

The Prosperity Initiative is an intergovernmental effort to develop wealthier communities across Pima County through policies that reduce generational poverty and improve opportunity.

Pima County is rich in human, cultural and environmental resources. We have many assets to build on, yet we have historically high levels of poverty that not only create suffering, but also impact the ability of the next generation to be financially successful. While the full effect of the pandemic is not yet known, in 2021 in Pima County, 15.1% of households lived in poverty; however, for children, the poverty rate was over 20%. Historic forms of systemic discrimination and lack of opportunity have negative lifetime and generational impacts that can make it substantially more difficult for those individuals and communities to break the cycle of poverty. Often unseen is a large financial cost borne by the community, not only from providing emergency and crisis management services but also from the unrealized workforce and economic development gains. Reducing poverty benefits everyone.

Many families who are not considered to be in poverty still face financial instability. The Financial Health Network reports that before the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly half (46.5%) of households reported that their income did not exceed their spending over the course of a year. Similarly, the United Way reported that 43% of Americans could not meet their monthly basic needs or have \$400 in savings. This means many families are just a paycheck, a rent increase, or an unexpected emergency away from a crisis. Living with the stress of this instability, whether it happens or not, takes its own toll. An economic and health crisis like COVID-19 can be enough to destabilize a family, which is why initial data shows the pandemic disproportionately affected lower income families, people of color and seniors. Without the recent rise in state and local minimum wage, along with temporary increases in federal tax credits and emergency rental assistance, the impact would have been much worse.

Research shows that certain policies and investments not only assist those in need, but also reduce costs to the community as a whole and return greater long-term value. This is especially true when focused on families with children, and in particular single mothers and families of color. While there are multiple efforts across the region to address the immediate needs and alleviate suffering of those in poverty, they are often not enough to move people out of poverty. This is not an argument to reduce the safety net, but to use this opportunity to think and plan for the longer-term with the focus on breaking the cycle of poverty and creating the conditions for individual and community prosperity. Addressing historic inequities will make the greatest difference. Richard Besser, president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, states: “We will not create a healthier, sustainable and more equitable system until income and skin color are no longer determining factors in how well and how long people live.”

Based on national research, *the Prosperity Initiative* has identified these **four policy areas** that provide the greatest opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and contribute to growing the wealth and prosperity of the overall region: (1) ensure the availability of jobs that will economically support a household, 2) increase housing stability, 3) provide equitable and effective resources, and 4) build individual and community assets.

Within this framework, both strategic and tactical elements are needed. Strategic elements are longer-term solutions that address opportunities for generational asset building. Tactical elements are also needed to provide shorter-term solutions to address immediate needs and barriers until such time that the longer-term benefits can be realized.

The Prosperity Initiative is a collaboration of eight area governments in Pima County (see below) along with input from the community. The goal of the first stage is to develop five to 10 policy positions that can be adopted or adapted by any of these governing bodies. The second stage will focus on aligning local government operations and investments to best implement those policies.

All policy recommendations will be based on research from credible and recognized sources. University of Arizona researchers are assisting with this project. Policy ideas will be reviewed and vetted by stakeholders from government, community and faith-based organizations, the business sector and people with lived experience to ensure that these policies are a fit for our area and reflect priorities. Eleven guiding principles are being used to ensure that these policies are as effective and equitable as possible (see below).

Participating Pima County Area Governments:

1. City of Tucson
2. City of South Tucson
3. Pascua Yaqui Tribe
4. Pima County
5. Tohono O’odham Nation
6. Town of Marana
7. Town of Oro Valley
8. Town of Sahuarita

Prosperity Initiative - Guiding Principles for Developing Policy Recommendations

1. Policies must focus on reducing generational poverty, as opposed to only alleviating the suffering of those experiencing poverty, which is too often the focus.
2. Each policy statement must include strategic and tactical elements. Strategic elements are aimed at addressing the root causes of barriers preventing individuals from achieving generational opportunities and wealth, thereby providing long-term, sustainable solutions. Tactical elements are also needed to provide short-term solutions to address immediate needs and crisis situations until such time that the benefits from longer-term strategic solutions can be realized.
3. Policies must be evidence-based and endorsed or recommended by national level, non-partisan, well-recognized authorities on anti-poverty strategies (i.e. Federal Reserve Banks, National Academy of Sciences, nationally renowned university based poverty research centers etc.).
4. Policies must be applicable at the local government level, as opposed to the State or Federal level, and include ideas for implementation that are achievable at the local level.
5. Policies must be informed by local service providers, experts, committees and commissions, and those with lived experience.
6. The return on investment for such policies, or implementation measures frequently associated with such policies, must be considered and documented where applicable.
7. Policies must target populations experiencing the highest rates of poverty in Pima County and which have the greatest potential for impact: children, single mothers, individuals and families of color, and seniors.
8. Policies should take into consideration the impact of historic and/or systemic inequities and when possible, prioritize opportunities to address and mitigate them.
9. Addressing poverty is not a one-size fits all approach and some policies may be more applicable in some communities than others, or may be include different implementation ideas depending on the community.
10. Some policies may be more effective when implemented in conjunction with other policies.
11. Policy recommendations should be reviewed for unintended consequences.

If you’d like more information on the Prosperity Initiative, please contact Bonnie Bazata @ bonnie.bazata@pima.gov or 520-724-3704.